

## Is Your Co-Worker Now Your Boss? Get Ready for Some Changes

By David P. Willis

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When Remi Pauwels followed his colleague to a new job at a recruiting firm in the late 1990s, he soon realized there would be some changes.

At their old job, Pauwels and Frankie Francese were co-workers, on an equal footing. At the new job, Francese was his boss.

"I thought I would be working for him; it wouldn't be much different than when we worked together," said Pauwels, 31. But their relationship had changed. "If there was a time that maybe I was falling behind or needed to step things up, he would let me know."

He realized that his friend Francese had an office to run and had to make budgets and quotas. "I would answer the challenge and do whatever I needed to do," Pauwels said.

It worked out. The two men remained friends and are now partners in their own company, Fortis Consulting Group, a Tinton Falls, N.J., recruiting firm.

In today's workplace, the promotion of one person to a supervisor in charge of fellow co-workers is common.

"Every time you pick a new leader, there was someone who wasn't chosen," said Ed Ryterband, a corporate psychologist and managing director at RHR International in New York City. "It is a very, very significant issue that gets very little attention."

It signals a change in the workplace. For the co-workers and their new boss, things will not be the same.

"You are not one among us, you are one above us," said Donna Flagg, principal of The Krysalis Group, a business and management consulting firm in New York City.

The situation has pitfalls for bosses and workers. First, a new boss may feel

that everything will remain the same, said Donna Coulson, owner of Live Your Life Staff Development and Training in Middletown, N.J.

Wrong. As a new boss, you will do performance reviews, plot the course of the work team and have a say on the size of workers' raises, she said.

"It changes the dynamic of the relationship," she said. "Whether you want it or not, now this person is in charge."

The boss also has access to confidential information about other workers or the direction of the company, details that can't be shared with others, even a friend, at work.

Workers might feel that a boss might play favorites, Coulson said.

"They might think that I as a supervisor might let them get away with murder because I am their buddy or friend," she said.

Or it might go the other way: "As an employee, I have to wonder if you are going to be harder on me because I am your buddy," Coulson said.

Friendships before the promotion might be strained by developments at work. Perhaps there's a worry that a boss is going to violate a friend's confidences, Coulson said. "You know what my snide comments are about people."

Jealousies can enter the picture. The worker who was passed over may have friends who can cause problems for a



new boss by not cooperating, said Karl Gordinier, a retired executive who now owns a consulting firm.

Much depends on how a company handles the transition, said Ryterband.

Fifty percent of people who are newly hired to an executive position leave in the first 18 months, he said. "Part of that is the way they are hired and integrated is haphazard," he said.

It can start before the promotion is made. A good process will let promotion candidates know where they stand before the decision is made, said Gordinier.

Once the decision is made, the best way to avoid the potential problems is communication.

Francese said that each stage of their changing relationship — going from peers to subordinate and supervisor to business partners — went smoothly. An open line of communication was key, he said.

"We have been able to maintain that in each of the relationships that we had."